GETTING RESULTS *fact sheet*

Involving Parents in Prevention Efforts

Practicing positive parenting behaviors at home and taking a youth development (YD) approach that involves parents at school will result in youths who are resilient and less vulnerable to negative peer influence.

Youth Connection to Family and School Is Key

One of the most interesting bodies of research about healthy YD shows the importance of what is called "connectedness." Youths who feel close to, cared for, and valued by their families and other adults in their school and community are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana; engage in violent behavior; and display emotional distress. A child's sense of connectedness is fostered by the presence of parents at key times during the day (for example, at waking, after school, at dinner, at bedtime); a positive parent-child relationship; and parenting behaviors such as emotional support, consistent discipline, monitoring, and communication of family values (Resnick et al. 1997; Resnick 2000; Kumpfer and Alvarado 2003).

Parenting Style Makes a Difference

Authoritative parenting. It is characterized by parents who are warm, firm, and democratic, and it is effective in promoting a child's sense of connection to his or her family (Steinberg et al. 1992). Authoritative parents:

· Show interest and actively participate in the child's life.

· Encourage open communication among family members.

· Demonstrate trust and acceptance of family members.

· Encourage the child's psychological autonomy.

· Work to create a positive parent-child relationship by providing praise, encouragement, and physical affection and having frequent communication, including asking for the child's opinions and sharing secrets (Cohen et al. 2007).

Children who have been raised in authoritative homes score higher on a variety of measures of competence, social development, self-perceptions, and mental health than those raised in authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful homes (Ballantine 2001).

> *Authoritative:* having power to influence thought, opinion, or behavior
>
> *Authoritarian:* favoring blind submission to authority

Parental monitoring. Youths whose parents know where they are, who they are with, and what they are doing are less likely to use drugs and be involved in violence. In contrast, inadequate parental monitoring contributes to the development of drug abuse and antisocial behavior (Biglan et al. 1995). Parental monitoring also lays a foundation for young people to make good choices when they are away from their parents. Parents who monitor their children:

· Set and enforce curfews.

· Know where they will be during nonschool hours.

· Know who their friends are.

· Know which adults are supervising them at parties.

Parents Are Children's Role Models

Parental behavior and expressed attitudes strongly influence children's behavior. Modeling responsible alcohol consumption, not smoking or using drugs, practicing nonviolent and socially responsible behavior, and voicing negative attitudes about high-risk and problem behavior will positively influence a child's actions. For example, indifference or a lack of parental concern about adolescent smoking may contribute to a child's experimentation with smoking and the likelihood he or she will become an established smoker (Distefan et al. 1998).

Parents can support their children's development by modeling healthy lifestyle behaviors. Children who arrive at school well rested, well nourished, and physically fit are better prepared to learn.

Parental Involvement Helps Children to Learn

All families can have a positive influence on their children's learning by talking to them about school, keeping them focused on learning and homework, and helping them plan for higher education and future careers. Interacting with children in this way fosters attributes that lead to learning, such as positive feelings about school and schoolwork, communicating with teachers, and having a motivation to learn (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 2005).

Although some families believe that education is strictly the responsibility of the school, it is vital for parents and the school to collaborate on a child's academic and social education. For example, in addition to the activities at home described earlier, parents should engage in the following school-based activities:

· Visiting or talking with teachers to discuss issues, share insights, and solve problems

· Assisting in the classroom during lunch breaks, class parties, or on field trips

· Attending student assemblies, sports events, and special presentations

· Volunteering at school events (games, dances, open house, fund-raising)

- Participating in parent organizations or on the school board
- Attending workshops, discussion groups, and training sessions for parents

Tips for Schools on Parental Involvement

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires schools to involve parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about their children's academic progress and other school activities so that parents (1) play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; (2) are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; and (3) are invited to be full partners in advocacy and decision-making processes regarding the education of their child.

Parental involvement is good for business: When schools in one study reported high levels of outreach to parents, students' test scores improved 40 percent compared with schools that reported low levels of outreach to parents (Henderson and Mapp 2002). These schools successfully involved parents by using a variety of strategies—particularly with parents who have a low income or whose first language is not English (Appleseed 2006). These schools:

- Invite and welcome parental involvement and address specific parental needs.
- Recognize, respect, and address cultural and social/class differences.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership of parents and school staff (Henderson and Mapp 2002).

The primary barrier to full parental involvement is a school culture that views parental attributes as weaknesses (Souto-Manning and Swick 2006). Schools that value diversity can involve parents through the following techniques:

1. Use a combination of communication strategies (phone calls, e-mails, letters, news-letters) to reach parents.
2. Be flexible in setting meeting times and locations.
3. Assure parents of a respectful and welcoming school climate and encourage immediate contact between parents, teachers, principals, and other administrative staff when concerns arise.
4. Offer parents what they need to get involved (child care, transportation, incentives, translation services, English tutoring, education in parenting and child development, opportunities for adult education, workshops in leadership and advocacy).
5. Support parent networks (e.g., parent-to-parent outreach, bilingual-bicultural liaisons) and encourage parent leaders to establish mentoring relationships for less-experienced parents and recruit volunteers for school activities.
6. Provide student homework that engages parents. Children's enthusiasm for school activities is one of the major reasons parents become involved in school (Hahn et al. 1996).
7. Choose school-based prevention programs with parental involvement components. Prevention programs are most effective when the family is involved and parents apply the lessons students are learning in school to the home environment (Elias et al. 1997).

Summary

Parents play a vital role in helping their children to feel connected and valued by their families and schools. Schools can help parents to strengthen their skills in nurturing connectedness and becoming more involved in their school activities. Together, families and schools can raise healthy and self-confident youths who are respected by their peers and by the adults in their communities.

Resources for Parents

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services
http://www.brycs.org (Outside Source)

California Department of Education
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/default.htm (Outside Source)

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center
http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/parents/index.asp (Outside Source)

Parents: The Anti-Drug
http://theantidrug.com (Outside Source)

Parents: Be Role Models for Your Children
http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov (Outside Source)

Resources for Schools

Appleseed
http://www.appleseednetwork.org (Outside Source)

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services
http://www.brycs.org (Outside Source)

California Healthy Kids Resource Center
http://www.californiahealthykids.org (Outside Source)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
http://www.casel.org (Outside Source)

Getting Parents Involved
http://www.gettingparentsinvolved.com (Outside Source)

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
http://www.ncpie.org (Outside Source)

National Network of Partnership Schools
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000 (Outside Source)

Public Education Network
http://www.publiceducation.org (Outside Source)

The Partnership for Learning
http://www.partnership4learning.org/ (Outside Source)

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